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SUBJECT: USFK COMMANDER'S INTRODUCTORY CALLS ON FM BAN AND
NSA SONG -- ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION AND NORTH KOREA

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) During his February 22 introductory calls on FM Ban Ki-moon and Blue House Secretary for Foreign Affairs Song Min-soon, USFK Commander General Bell urged the ROKG to find a quick solution to the environmental remediation issue. Song briefly shared his views on the North Korean nuclear issue. The Ambassador accompanied General Bell.

Environmental Remediation -----

¶2. (C) Note: The return of closed USFK bases has been delayed by an impasse over environmental remediation. The latest U.S. compromise proposal, tabled by General LaPorte just before his departure, is still under consideration by the ROKG. End Note.

¶3. (C) Previewing his generally upbeat assessment of the alliance in his upcoming Congressional testimony, General Bell emphasized the importance of finding a quick solution to the environmental remediation issue. Noting Congress's concerns and sensitivities about certain issues, the Commander expressed hope that he would be able to take back positive news on the complex environmental issue. He pointed out that the last U.S. proposal represented a good-faith effort by the U.S. to find a way to accommodate ROK concerns. The proposal has already been approved by Secretary Rumsfeld based on an indication that it would be accepted by the ROKG, and therefore could not be renegotiated.

¶4. (C) FM Ban said the ROKG understood the importance of the issue and would try to find a solution as quickly as possible. In a much more contentious exchange, Secretary Song said ROK experts had different views about how best to deal with environmental problems on USFK bases. It was a question of different approaches and methodology for implementing the LaPorte proposal -- not, he claimed, an effort to get the U.S. to spend more than the \$150 million that would be used to implement the original U.S. proposal (Bell interjected that the proposal was about specific actions the U.S. would take, not money). The ROKG was trying hard to reach a settlement, Song maintained, but it was important to move cautiously given the NGO community's interest in the issue. Given the different expert opinions and the sensitivities among NGOs and the ROK public, the ROKG would like to "reshape or reorganize" the U.S. proposal, not renegotiate it. Repeatedly insisting that the difference

between the two governments was a matter of slight change in methodology, Song indicated that the ROKG hoped to resolve the issue perhaps at the next Security Policy Initiative meeting (March 20-21).

15. (C) Rejecting Song's characterization that it was simply a matter of slight difference in methodology, General Bell made clear that the last U.S. proposal could not be renegotiated and urged the ROKG to accept the U.S. offer. The Ambassador reminded Song that the U.S. proposal involved the U.S. voluntarily assuming an additional mission or task beyond the legal requirements under the SOFA. It was important to reach an agreement quickly on the mission as proposed by General LaPorte, and then let the engineers work out the details of implementation. He added that U.S. experts thought that the Korean proposals presented in Guam would expand the mission beyond what LaPorte envisaged, and did not merely represent a change in methodology. The Ambassador and General Bell stressed that dragging out discussions of this issue would only make it more difficult to resolve.

NSA Song on North Korea

16. (C) Song said the North Korea nuclear issue and the Six Party process required a bold approach. Pyongyang was feeling vulnerable; it was important to find a better way to negotiate with them. However, many in Korea did not have confidence that the U.S. was fully focused on resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. This was not a problem that could be allowed to drift, Song warned. If the U.S. and Korea did not become more proactive, Pyongyang would turn to PRC and come under even greater Chinese influence. That

would not be in U.S. or ROK interest. Moreover, if the North Korea nuclear weapons program proceeded unchecked, there was a risk that others with greater nuclear expertise, such as Taiwan and Japan, would take the nuclear path. That also would not be in anyone's interest. What was needed from the U.S., Song concluded, was a focused and proactive approach, focused on finding practical solutions, and one that put aside moralistic questions of whether North Korea is evil.

17. (C) The Ambassador assured Song that senior levels of the USG were spending lots of time on North Korea strategy, despite the current public focus on Iran, and that we were interested in a bold approach. Earlier, Song told the Ambassador that he was keen to visit Washington this week in order to provide Korean input to the ongoing NK policy review before final decisions were taken. He indicated that Seoul is concerned about an overly strong emphasis on internal transformation within North Korea and a loss of focus on the nuclear issue.

VERSHBOW